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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Pelton Case and the Press

The Post's editorial on the Pelton case ["Leaks and Cautions," June 1] misses the boat: the ultimate responsibility for weighing "competing interests" in considering publication of classified material rests not with the executive branch of government or with "responsible" journalists but rather with the courts. The Post readily accedes to other laws, such as those related to copyright and libel, for which court decisions have carefully defined the restrictions on its right to publish. With the Pentagon Papers court case as a precedent, The Post should welcome the chance to have the limitations on publication in the current situation determined by the one institution in our society empowered to decide this key issue: the judiciary.

ALLAN R. GLASS
Bethesda

I value my freedom of speech as much as I value the freedom of the press. If I chose to reveal national secrets in a public forum, and those revelations were harmful to the national security of the United States and in violation of the law, I would anticipate being prosecuted.

The Post's journalistic right to publish what it decides is appropriate is guaranteed in the First Amendment. However, when its decision violates a law and can be shown to have caused

damage, then it too should be prosecuted. If the newspaper does not like the laws that have been enacted, then The Post should try to persuade U.S. legislators to make a change.

Concerning the editorial of June 1, it is the height of arrogance to suggest that the media should not be held responsible for their acts because they "apply cautions of their own" and are not "promiscuous" in exercising the rights of a free press. There is no valid reason why the press should stand above the law.

GEORGE L. De MARCO
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When CIA Director William Casey began his campaign of "cautionary prosecution" against the media on the issue of disclosure of sensitive communications intelligence, he conveniently overlooked the gaffe committed by the president who, on the eve of the strike against Libya, informed us that we had been reading encoded Libyan messages that revealed the involvement of Libya in terroristic activities. (The Libyans, incidentally, reported subsequently that they were changing their communications procedures.)

It seems that when Mr. Casey came to bat, he struck out.

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